

The Embodied Damnation of James Hogg’s Justified Sinner

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In James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), when the eponymous “justified sinner,” Robert Wringhim, first contemplates the possibility of publishing his memoirs he declares, “I thought if once I could print my own works, how I would astonish mankind, and confound their self wisdom and their esteemed morality – blow up the idea of any dependence on good works, and *morality*, forsooth!” (152). Wringhim’s confessional text, said to be uncannily recovered from his grave and presented as an authentic manuscript by an “Editor”, recounts how he comes to take the Calvinist doctrine of predestination to its antinomian extreme – becoming convinced by a mysterious figure, Gil-Martin, who may be either a figment of his diseased imagination or the devil himself, that as one of the ‘elect’ he may never truly sin. He is led to commit fratricide, which at first enables him to become heir to the estate of Dalcastle, but his narrative ultimately culminates in exile and suicide. Wringhim claims that he cannot remember the murderous deeds and licentious actions he is accused of committing while resident at Dalcastle, and faced with conflicting evidence, the reader is left to guess whether he is at times in a delusional state or possessed by the devil.

The unaccountability of Wringhim’s experience by either rational scientific or traditional supernatural explanations was recognised, albeit unappreciatively, by its earliest reviewers (see: “Hogg’s *Confessions*”). Modern critics have come to view this technique as one of the most powerful aspects of Hogg’s masterpiece and as pervading his corpus as a whole; however, André Gide’s contention in his introduction to the pivotal Cresset edition, that the fantastic aspects of *Confessions* are “always psychologically explicable, without having recourse to the supernatural” (xv), has reverberated through Hogg scholarship, with scholars providing psychoanalytic and modern psychiatric interpretations, as well as working to identify aspects of early nineteenth-century scientific and medical culture that may have informed the text.¹ Some find such “psychological” readings unconvincing. In his Afterword to the Stirling/South Carolina edition, Ian Campbell asserts that, “Obviously”, reading Gil-Martin as “a delusion of Wringhim’s imagination [. . .] might involve a more extensive knowledge of the subconscious mind than could be expected of Hogg’s own time” (185–6). This may be true in regard to psychoanalytic readings, but the vast range of contemporary scientific writings on proto-psychological subjects in the early nineteenth century could have provided a formulation for a purely hallucinatory experience deeply connected to the mind and body of the individual. If they do not, this was a powerful authorial choice.

Scientific writings that provided physiological explanations for apparently supernatural experiences were in vogue in Edinburgh when Hogg composed the *Confessions*, and these writings developed in close dialogue with the literary debate surrounding the ‘explained supernatural.’ According to E. J. Clery, Ann Radcliffe’s use of this technique was a response to the unacceptability of encouraging superstitious beliefs in her readers, but despite her initial critical success, both Coleridge and Sir Walter Scott soon critiqued her “enlightenment endings” (108). Writing in the *Quarterly Review* in May 1810, Scott’s primary critique of Radcliffe’s use of the explained supernatural was the “total and absolute disproportion between

the cause and effect, which must disgust every reader much more than if he were left under the delusion of ascribing the whole to supernatural agency" (344). The popular medical treatises of John Ferriar, John Alderson and Samuel Hibbert, which worked to provide physiological explanations of apparently supernatural experiences, appear to be, at least in part, responses to Scott's critique. The second edition of Hibbert's *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions; or, An Attempt to Trace such Illusions to their Physical Causes*, published in 1825, was dedicated to Scott, and Ferriar brought *An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* (1813) into dialogue with literary criticism in the preface, in which he offered "to the manufacturers of ghosts, the privilege of raising them, in as great numbers, and in as horrible a guise as they may think fit, without offending against true philosophy, and even without violating probability" (vii). While Ferriar began to outline his basic physiological argument for a naturalistic understanding of apparitional experiences in a paper delivered to the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester in 1786, it was not until after Scott and Coleridge's critique of Radcliffe that he brought his theory into direct dialogue with literary culture.

In turn, in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830), Scott cited "the learned and astute Dr Ferriar of Manchester" (22) and discussed Hibbert as "most ingeniously, as well as philosophically" treating the subject from "a medical point of view" (22–3). Scott extracted "singular and interesting" (23) cases from their works, while also piously concluding that "[t]he abstract possibility of apparitions must be admitted by everyone who believes in a Deity, and His superintending omnipotence" (47).²

The 'Ettrick Shepherd', however, was often more critical of the rationalising tendencies of the era, and in the prefix to his tale, "The Mysterious Bride," published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in December 1830, he classifies Scott among those who "now-a-days are beginning broadly to insinuate that there are no such things as ghosts, or spiritual beings visible to mortal sight" (155).³ As such, it would be easy to read the unaccountability of the *Confessions* as a critical subversion of the physiological 'explained supernatural' of the Romantic period. As Ian Duncan notes, Hogg specialised "in narratives that invoke the supernatural in order to affirm the potency of traditional rural culture" (Duncan, "Scottish Gothic" 76). However, despite his dedication to the traditional and the folkloric (particularly through his carefully constructed literary persona, the 'Ettrick Shepherd'), Hogg was also clearly imaginatively stimulated by the vibrant scientific and medical culture of post-Enlightenment Edinburgh.

Hogg was enmeshed in the world of early nineteenth-century popular print culture, in which topics relating to the burgeoning mental sciences were thrashed out each month in the major review journals, such as the *Edinburgh Review*, as well as in popular literary magazines, such as *Blackwood's* (in which the dubiously authenticating advertisement for the *Confessions*, "A Scots Mummy," was published in August 1823). As such, despite his autodidactic background, the self-proclaimed "king o' the mountain an' fairy school of poetry" (Hogg, *Anecdotes of Scott* 61) would become "more attuned to the intellectual currents of advanced modernity, including radical materialism, than any contemporary Scots author" (Duncan, *Scott's Shadow* 210). From his early authorship of a treatise on the diseases of sheep, to the apparitional encounters and apoplexies of *Winter Evening Tales* (1820) and "The Shepherd's Calendar" series (1819–28), the "magic lantern" of *The Three Perils of Man* (1822), and the haunting portrayal of Gatty Bell's galvanised body and coma in *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823), Hogg's engagement with Romantic-era science

was both wide-ranging and sustained (see: Bold; Coyer; Inglis, "My Ingenious Answer"; "Maternity, Madness and Mechanization").

Within the developing critical framework of Scottish Romanticism, critics are now accustomed to viewing Hogg's engagement with Romantic-era science in terms of his critique of the post-Enlightenment Scottish 'romance revival' led by Scott and the wits of *Blackwood's Magazine*. Modernity's attempts to retrieve, preserve and, at times, reanimate the past – based on the assumption that the past has indeed been surmounted in the linear stagewise progress of Enlightenment stadial theory – are subverted, as Hogg confounds "both scientific and folkloric modes of representation" in uncanny images such as the "upright corpse" (Duncan, "Scottish Gothic" 77; "The Upright Corpse"; *Scott's Shadow* 183–214). This article, however, is concerned with how supposedly conflicting epistemological frameworks work together in Hogg's masterpiece. Drawing upon a range of scientific discourses, including the popular nineteenth-century 'science' of phrenology as well as theories of somnambulism, apparitional experiences, and addiction, the first sections of this article work to illustrate the contemporary physiological reasoning that underlies *both* the psychological and the demonic dimensions of Robert Wringhim's experience. They argue that, despite the logical contradictions of the text, the same natural order may be seen to preside over both realms. Rather than reading Hogg's work against the backdrop of Enlightenment stadial theory, the final section turns to a major contemporary figure, the Reverend Thomas Chalmers, who worked to illustrate the compatibility of Romantic-era science and supernatural Christianity and, crucially for the relevance of his work to Hogg's, was also an outspoken critic of antinomianism. The resonances between the *Confessions* and Chalmers' writings in the 1820s and 1830s demonstrate that Hogg's engagement with nineteenth-century science should be read as an integral part of his creative engagement with fanatical antinomianism: in stark contrast to Wringhim's avowed attempt to "blow up the idea of any dependence on good works, and *morality*", the scientific discourses drawn upon by Hogg gesture towards physiological determinism only to emphasise the ability of habitual thoughts and actions – 'good works' or sinful transgressions – to transform the mind and the body, and thus ready the individual for the world to come.

Phrenological Predestination and Duplicity

Phrenology was one of the most debated topics in Edinburgh in the 1820s. The *Edinburgh Review* provided informed critique while *Blackwood's* led the way with satirical *non sequitur* and Gothicised parody, although "it is sometimes difficult to differentiate parody from formal model" (Strachan 58). Similarly, the Editor in the *Confessions*, anxiously grasping after the suicide's skull in the final exhumation scene, declares that he is "no phrenologist" (172), but as Peter Garside indicates, he "nevertheless manages to sound like one" in his descriptions of the extraordinary smoothness and roundness of the skull and the "little protuberance above the vent of the ear" (lii). Garside notes that the location of the protuberance corresponds to the phrenological organ of "Destructiveness," which is found to be large in the heads of "cool and deliberate murderers" (*Transactions of the Phrenological Society*, qtd. in Garside 254), and G. A. Starr has argued that Hogg may be pointing towards the parallel between antinomian predestination and the physiological determinism of phrenology: "Each body of belief, Hogg may be implying, tends to relieve the individual of moral responsibility by accounting for behaviour in a rigidly deterministic manner" (83). However, the observation on "the almost perfect rotundity" (172), which intriguingly points towards a nineteenth-century

conceptualisation of the double self, has yet to receive critical commentary and importantly undercuts the notion of rigid physiological determinacy that the citation of phrenology immediately prompts.

Indicative of the continued currency of 'the Great Chain of Being' into the nineteenth century, the phrenological organs were divided into those faculties shared by both humans and lower animals and those unique to mankind. The propensities, such as 'Amativeness', 'Acquisitiveness', and 'Destructiveness', and the inferior sentiments, such as 'Love of Approbation' and 'Self-Esteem', were common to both man and beast. The superior sentiments distinguished man as a moral being, and included such faculties as 'Benevolence', 'Veneration', 'Firmness', 'Conscientiousness', and 'Hope'. In some persons the animal propensities and inferior sentiments might be so dominant as to render them innately unfit to function in civilised society. In contrast, the moral sentiments might predominate to the extent that a person could not help but live a righteous life. According to the first major populariser of phrenology in Britain, Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, such a person "has no occasion for any law either for putting in action the superior faculties, or for preventing the abuses of his animal faculties, and is really elect" (500). However, the vast majority of persons fell into a third category, in which moral and animal faculties displayed a degree of balance and hence produced conflicting emotional responses. Such persons are characterised by the Edinburgh phrenologist, Robert Cox: "In the heat of passion they do acts which the higher powers afterwards loudly disapprove, and may truly be said to pass their days in alternate sinning and repenting" (57). As Gil-Martin indicates, "We are all subjected to two distinct natures in the same person" (132).

A skull in which all organs were of a similar size would be round and smooth, and the implication of the Editor's observation is that Wringhim's animal and moral faculties are (with the exception of his large 'Destructiveness') balanced, indicating internal struggle. Wringhim writes of his youthful propensity towards sinfulness and attempts at repentance, and during his final days at Dalcastle he reports to be "at one time worshipping with great fervour of spirit, and at other times so wholly left to myself, as to work all manner of vices and follies with greediness" (133). In contrast to Wringhim's perceived status as one of the elect, the presence of an internal struggle emphasises the strong role of personal choice in determining the direction of his moral pathway. During the two periods of ablated consciousness at Dalcastle, this internal struggle appears to cease, and his violence, intemperance, gaudy dress, and licentiousness plausibly indicate a decided dominance of the animal faculties.

Barbara Bloedé has speculated that the case of Mary Reynolds, a so called "nineteenth-century case of double personality," may have been a model for Wringhim's dual states and notes that, like Mary Reynolds, whose alterations occur after a long period of sleep, "at least one of Robert's returns to consciousness after a period of amnesia occurs after waking from a 'profound and feverish sleep'" (120). Bloedé provides a convincing analysis of the commonalities between Reynolds's and Wringhim's conditions as well as the sources from which Hogg may have acquired information about this and other similar cases. S. L. Mitchell's "A Double Consciousness, or a Duality of Person in the same Individual," published in the *Edinburgh Weekly Journal* in 1816, discusses Reynolds's case, and a "Report on a Communication from Dr. Dyce of Aberdeen, to the Royal Society of Edinburgh, 'On Uterine Irritation, and its Effects on the Female Constitution,'" published in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* in 1823, presents the case of another woman who experienced a similar phenomenon. Ian Hacking's work on the history of

what is today referred to as multiple personality disorder indicates that Mary Reynolds's case would have been classified as a form of somnambulism, emerging from phrenological conceptualisations of the double brain. Hacking identifies the second edition of Robert Macnish's *The Philosophy of Sleep*, published in 1834, as the most prominent source text for later discussions of Reynolds's case or "la dame de Mac-Nish" as she would become known in France (Hacking 139–40). The phrenological account of somnambulism forwarded by Macnish in 1834 is derived from *The Physiognomical System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim* (1815). According to Spurzheim all the various phenomena of sleep may be explained by the principle that "any particular organ, or even several organs, may be active while the other organs rest" (216). The period of ablated consciousness at Dalcastle may then be read as a variation on somnambulism, in which the animal faculties, over-stimulated by Gil-Martin, take control of Wringhim's actions. Macnish would later explain why over-stimulated faculties dominate a person's dreams, as a person's "pursuits in life, by strengthening one faculty, make it less susceptible, than such as are weaker, of being overcome by complete sleep" (*The Philosophy of Sleep* 63).

George Combe, the Edinburgh lawyer who became the leader of the Scottish phrenological movement, referenced both Dr. Mitchell's and Dr. Dyce's reports in *A System of Phrenology* as cases that lead some persons to believe that the conscious "I" may be attributed to a singular organ (107–12). Drawing upon the philosophy of Thomas Brown, he went on to delineate the more probable theory that consciousness was an overarching mental state to which particular faculties contribute. As such, the phenomenon of double consciousness remained "inexplicable" in phrenological terms (518). Macnish similarly wrote that "the particular state of the brain which induces such conditions will, I believe, ever remain a mystery," and, like Combe, noted the analogy between the state of mind during double consciousness and that which occurs during "magnetic sleep" (*The Philosophy of Sleep* 184–5). In a later "Case of Divided Consciousness," presented in a letter to the editor of the *Phrenological Journal and Miscellany of Edinburgh*, Combe tentatively asserted that the condition was the result of the brain being in an overall different condition rather than the affection of a particular organ, but observed that in the diseased state the organs of the propensities seem to be more active and the moral sentiments less active in comparison to the normal condition. Oddly, Combe did not appeal to the dual hemispheres of the brain in his explanation.

Phrenological anatomy was vital to the nineteenth-century understanding of the double brain (Harrington 6–34). Each phrenological organ had its own double in the opposite hemisphere, thus raising the possibility that a single side of the brain might be diseased. As such, in 1815 Spurzheim argued that "it is not true that consciousness is always single" (220) and evidenced his assertion with the observation that "[a] great number of madmen hear angels sing, or the devil roar &c. only on one side" (221). The locational specificity of Wringhim's delusion during a strange distemper in Edinburgh, wherein his loss of consciousness is still only partial, may be based on this conceptualisation of the double brain. While he lies in bed Wringhim conceives himself "to be two people": "I deemed there were two of us in it; when I sat up, I always beheld another person, and always in the same position from the place where I sat or stood, which was about three paces off me towards my left side" (106). Hogg appears to be laying down markers for plausible physiological explanations by modelling the periods of ablated consciousness on medical case studies of double consciousness that evaded full explanation (even by such an avowed rationalist as George Combe). At the same time, the most plausible scientific

explanation of Wringhim's experience is, like the scientific literature that tries to exorcise it, unaccountable.

Apparitional Explanations and a Murderous Stimulant

Wringhim's uncharacteristic sensual behaviour at Dalcastle may, of course, also be read as a demonic possession; if so, however, Hogg's devil acts through natural means. In his "Hymn to the Devil," first published within *The Three Perils of Man* (1822) and later inserted in the *Noctes Ambrosianae* dialogues of *Blackwood's* in March 1825, Hogg portrays a tangible devil, speeding through the night air, wreaking havoc by influencing the visions of those asleep. Drawing upon the externalist theory of dreaming, as forwarded by the Scottish metaphysician, Andrew Baxter, which argued that immortal spirits take over the external sensory apparatus during sleep and stimulate them so as to generate motions of the nerves and the corresponding ideas, the devil is shown to control the sensory apparatus of the dreamer, framing "images" ("Hymn to the Devil" 33) and able to "[t]ickle" and "tease" (61) the passions. In the *Noctes Ambrosianae* Christopher North responds to what he refers to as the Shepherd's "Ode to the Devil" by asking if he has seen "Dr Hibbert's book on Apparitions?" (370)

North is, of course, referring to Hibbert's *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions* (1824), cited above as one of several popular medical treatises on the topic of apparitions that were published contemporaneously with the *Confessions*. Ferriar's *An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* (1813) was the most influential, but in *An Essay on Apparitions, in which their Appearance is Accounted for by Causes Wholly Independent of Preternatural Agency* (1823), John Alderson accuses Ferriar of plagiarising his theory of apparitions, first presented to the public in an essay published in the *Edinburgh Medical and Chirurgical Journal* in July 1810 (viii). A new and enlarged edition of Alderson's text was published by Longman in 1823 (notably the same publisher as Hogg's *Confessions*), and in the winter of the same year, Hibbert read an "Essay on Spectral Impressions" to the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The popularity of his essay led to the production of the full-length volume of 1824 and the second edition of 1825 (Hibbert v). Carrying on from Ferriar's essay, which was more valuable for "affording abundant evidence of the existence of morbid impressions of this nature, without any sensible external agency, than in establishing, as he proposed, a general law of the system, to which the origin of spectral impressions could be inferred" (242), Hibbert defined apparitions as "nothing more than ideas, or the recollected images of the mind, which have been rendered as vivid as actual impressions" (v).

The Edinburgh phrenologists were keenly interested in apparitional phenomena. In a letter to Hibbert in 1824 Combe writes that the subject has "formed part of my lectures for the three last seasons," and the *Phrenological Journal* included a review of Hibbert's work, which criticised his neglect of the phrenological principles that clarified the specificity of the delusion according to the plurality of organs. They explain:

The brain consists of a congeries of organs, each of which manifests a particular power of the mind. Among these organs one serves to perceive Form; another Colour; a third Size; while other and *distinct* faculties and organs experience emotions and reflect. Each faculty being active, produces the special kind of ideas which it is fitted to form; and each may become active by an internal stimulus of its organ. The organs may be excited by an

unusual influx of blood into the vessels which supply them; by inflammation; or by nervous irritation. (547)

Read in terms of the phrenological theory of apparitions, Gil-Martin may be read as a projection of ideas, associated with specifically diseased (i.e. over-stimulated) phrenological organs, vivified to the intensity of actual impressions.

As Gavin Budge has explained, so-called "Brunonian" theories of stimulation informed early nineteenth-century apparitional theories (11–14). The Scottish physician, John Brown, developed this controversial medical theory, which defined all diseases as the result of excessive or insufficient nervous stimulation and was viewed by many as a radical simplification of the nervous physiology of his teacher, William Cullen (Lawrence). In the medical writings of the early nineteenth century, rather than the immortal spirits of Baxter's externalist theory, a range of psychological and environmental factors were invested with the potential to excite the nerves and vivify their corresponding ideas. Such increased vivacity, according to Hibbert, for example, was linked to "some peculiar state of the sanguineous fluid" (69–70), comparable to the state induced by Sir Humphry Davy's nitrous oxide experiments. For Hibbert, a wide range of factors might lead to a similar state, including constitutional tendencies, "suppression of accustomed evacuations" (102), poisons, inebriation, and, more generally, "nervous irritation" (101). However, such "morbific" affections also interacted with "moral agents" to give the spectral illusion its particular character (315), and he cites Pinel on the prevalence of religious fanaticism in acting as such a moral agent (330).

Just prior to Wringhim's first meeting with Gil-Martin, he is in a state of religious ecstasy. Having finally learned of his assured position among the elect from the Reverend Wringhim, his "whole frame seemed to be renewed; every nerve was buoyant with new life" (80). Upon first meeting the "stranger youth," the physicality of the moment intensifies, and Wringhim declares: "I can never describe the strange sensations that thrilled through my whole frame at that impressive moment" (80). This intensified nervous stimulation is maintained during their meeting, as Wringhim writes that his "mind had all the while been kept in a state of agitation resembling the motion of a whirlpool" (81). Hogg appears to be gesturing towards the physiological state associated with delusional apparitional experiences, and in accordance with Brunonian medicine, this experience also exhausts Wringhim's frame. He departs "not with the same buoyancy and lightness of heart" (82), and upon his arrival home the Reverend Wringhim declares that he has been physically "transformed, since the morning" (83).

Accounts of "the addictive spiral created by overstimulation of the nerves" (Budge 12), wherein greater levels of stimulation are continually required to achieve the same effect, are characteristic of Brunonian medicine. In Hogg's novel, Gil-Martin – who at first appears to be a hallucinatory result of Wringhim's nervous excitement – comes to himself act as an intense stimulant. Wringhim refers to his "thirst" (107) for his companionship and rapidly develops an inability to "live without him" (88) and a corresponding disdain for the comparatively mild stimulation of his mother and Reverend Wringhim's religious bombast. His thirst for the company of Gil-Martin is mirrored in his growing desire to kill his brother. He writes, "I *had* a desire to slay him, it is true, and such a desire too as a thirsty man has to drink" (101). Eventually, Wringhim turns to the more traditional stimulating properties of alcohol. Gil-Martin and Mrs. Keeler both accuse him of "extreme inebriety" (121) upon his

waking from the first period of ablated consciousness at Dalcastle, and the second period is preceded by heavy drinking.

Richard Jackson has noted the similarities between Wringhim's experience and the opium eating famously described in De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, first serialised in the *London Magazine* in 1821. He does not argue that Wringhim is taking opium, but rather that Hogg was aware of its effects and is drawing upon this knowledge in his portrayal of Wringhim's experience. In his first popular medical treatise, *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* (1827), Macnish draws upon De Quincey's *Confessions* in the chapter on "Drunkenness Modified by the Inebriating Agent" and explains the difference between the drunkenness of opium and wine:

There is more poetry in its visions, more mental aggrandisement, more range of imagination. Wine invigorates the animal powers and propensities chiefly, but opium strengthens those peculiar to man, and gives for a period, amounting to hours, a higher tone to the thinking faculties. (22–3)

Hogg's choice of wine over opium for Wringhim's inebriation accords well with the murderous stimulatory propensities of Gil-Martin. While the insinuation that Wringhim was in fact inebriated during the months of conscious oblivion tempts the rationalising reader to ignore the diabolical dimension, Hogg's utilisation of a physiological phenomenon also serves to demarcate the fleshly nature of evil. His addiction to Gil-Martin becomes an addiction to his demonic stimulation of his "animal powers and propensities."

According to phrenological theory, the actions of Gil-Martin, would stimulate the lower faculties of 'Destructiveness', 'Self-esteem', 'Love of Approbation' and 'Acquisitiveness', and suppress the superior faculties of 'Benevolence', 'Veneration', and 'Conscientiousness'. While interrupting his prayers, Gil-Martin elevates Wringhim's "spiritual pride" (81) and presents the advantages to be gained from "the estate and riches" (100) of Dalcastle at the small cost of destroying sinners whose presence degrades the life of the elect. Taking a demonic reading into account, Gil-Martin's "cameleon art" enables him to enter into Wringhim's mind and thus formulate his discourse to stimulate the animal faculties in such a way as to increase his propensity towards evil behaviours. Conformable to Baxter's externalist theory, such stimulation is more easily achieved during sleep:

But the most singular instance of this wonderful man's power over my mind was, that he had as complete influence over me by night as by day. All my dreams corresponded exactly with his suggestions; and when he was absent from me, still his arguments sunk deeper in my heart than even when he was present. (93)

The phrenological explanation of dreaming and somnambulism, in which only certain faculties are active during sleep, also conforms well to the increased potency of Gil-Martin's arguments. Spurzheim explains that "the manifestations of the active organs are then often more perfect and more energetic; the sensations are more lively, and the reflections deeper, than in a state of watching" (217–18).

Physiology here underpins both demonic and psychological readings. However, in waking life the "natural, and amiable" (100) feelings against the socially destructive force of murder work against Gil-Martin, as "there are certain trains and

classes of thoughts that have great power in enervating the mind" and "[t]hese THOUGHTS are hard enemies wherewith to combat!" (110–11). Wringhim's final murders do not occur until his body and mind have been so amalgamated with Gil-Martin as to prevent internal conflict. This amalgamation is accompanied by both moral and physical decay, attributable both to Gil-Martin's demonic influence and to the ravages of the guilty conscience that persistently returns to haunt Wringhim's lucid moments.

The Devil of the Flesh

At their final meeting, Mrs. Calvert evokes potent Biblical imagery in her description of the moral and physical degradation of Wringhim:

"I never in my life saw any human being," said Mrs. Calvert, "who I thought so like a fiend. If a demon could inherit flesh and blood, that youth is precisely such a being as I could conceive that demon to be. The depth and the malignity of his eye is hideous. His breath is like the airs from a charnel house, and his flesh seems fading from his bones, as if the worm that never dies were gnawing it away already." (62)

Wringhim, or his devilish doppelgänger, at this point has murdered his brother, mother, and potentially his lover, all with the conviction that as one of the elect he may never truly sin. As the notes to the Stirling/South Carolina edition indicate, "the worm that never dies" refers to Isaiah 66.24 and Mark 9.43-9.48. It is "[o]ne of the attributes of hell spoken of by Jesus," and according to David Lyle Jeffrey, this "image gives rise to grotesque imaginings in *memento mori* literature of the late Middle Ages" and "became a circumlocution for the operation of the conscience in medieval morality plays" (851). Jeffrey notes its utilisation by De Quincey and Poe to express "unrelieved grief" in the nineteenth century (851), and in an essay on "Ghosts and Dreams" for the Glasgow periodical, *The Emmet*, in 1824 Macnish draws upon this imagery in commenting upon the racked conscience of the murderer: "For him is reserved the worm that gnaws unseen – the pang that never dies" (292). Macnish then returns to the image in his short fictional pamphlet, *Confessions of an Unexecuted Femicide* (1827), which Karl Miller has read as "responding to Hogg's recently published *Confessions*" (206), to describe the murderer's remorseful suffering. The image serves as a poignant indication that one may escape the punishment of the laws of men, and thus remain "unexecuted," but one may not escape divine justice as inscribed in the natural laws of mind and body.

Thomas Chalmers also evokes this image in what Jonathan Topham terms his "natural theology of conscience" (165–8). Though best remembered for his leadership in the Disruption of 1843, Chalmers first gained popular renown primarily through his *Discourses on the Christian Revelation, Viewed in Connection with the Modern Astronomy* (1817), and following on from the success of the "Astronomical Discourses," he continued to draw upon connections between evangelical theology and Romantic-era science in his writings.⁴ He came to view human conscience as the "strongest presumptive evidence for the existence of a moral governor" (Topham 165), and Topham identifies his Bridgewater Treatise, *On the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God, as Manifested in the Adaptation of External Nature, to the Moral and Intellectual Constitution of Man* (1833), as the culmination of this discourse. In this treatise Chalmers draws upon the same delineation of natural laws – both moral and physical – that Combe avowed in *The Constitution of Man in Relation to External*

Objects (1828), and Combe thought Chalmers' work was bordering upon plagiarism (Hilton 195; van Wyhe 195–6). A primary difference between the two texts is that, unlike Chalmers, Combe bypasses the notion of original sin and thus the need for divine revelation (van Wyhe 196). However, both emphasised the need for man to understand his natural moral and physical constitution for the betterment of the individual and society. As Roger Cooter aptly observes, despite its "Calvinist" inheritance, phrenology "fulfilled the optimistic implications of evangelical Arminianism, the possibility of perfection on earth" (194). While Combe focuses upon the importance of phrenological principles in teaching persons to maintain an appropriately restrained balance between their animal and moral faculties (the very restrained balance that Wringhim fails to manage), Chalmers more broadly builds upon the "moral sense" philosophy predominant in Scotland from Francis Hutcheson onwards, focusing more exclusively on the innate benevolence of mankind.

While maintaining the doctrine of predestination, Chalmers' "natural theology of conscience," particularly as it developed within his *Sermons Preached in St. John's Church, Glasgow* (1823), critiqued those who dismissed the importance of good works. For example, in a sermon "On the Doctrine of Predestination" he declares the ultimate fate of every individual to be "one of the secret things which belong to God" (*Sermons Preached in St. John's Church* 297). However, he explains, "the same God who ordains the end, ordains also the means which go before it" (*Sermons Preached in St. John's Church* 311), and "unless the deeds done in your body be good deeds, and ye bring forth those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God, ye shall not be saved" (*Sermons Preached in St. John's Church* 312).

Crawford Gribben has shown that the Wringhims's particular brand of antinomianism is not representative of any sect of Scottish Calvinism, historically or in the 1820s (13). However, beyond the often-cited relevant historical context of the "Marrow Controversy" of 1718–23, the text is generally responsive to the "hardening of attitudes" (Garside xxvii) regarding predestination within the Scottish Kirk and among Dissenting groups through the 1820s. It is this dogmatism and particularly dogmatic antinomianism that Chalmers likewise rhetorically targets in his sermons. For example, in "The Nature of the Kingdom of God" he critiques the "impregnable Antinomian" for thinking "he will have heaven, because he has faith," defending the importance of good works by underlining the continuity of moral character between this life and next, as "[i]t is here that heaven begins. It is here that eternal life is entered upon. It is here that man first breathes the air of immortality" (*Sermons Preached in St. John's Church* 235). He continues this line of argument in a sermon, "Necessity of Moral and Spiritual discipline of the whole Life" (later renamed "Heaven a Character and not a Locality" in his *Collected Works*), delivered "at the National Scotch Church, Regent Square, July 7, 1833," wherein he declares that "[i]f the moral character, then, of these future states of existence were distinctly understood, and constantly applied, it would serve directly and decisively to extinguish Antinomianism" ("A Sermon, Delivered by the Rev. Dr. Chalmers" 72).

Chalmers appeals to "the worm that dieth not" twice in this particular sermon. Hell and heaven are depicted as moral characters, rather than physical locations, and he analogises a material image of hell with the depravity of the distempered individual on earth:

Each is ripening for his own everlasting destiny; and, whether in the depravities that deepen and accumulate on the character of the one, or in the

graces that brighten and multiply upon the other, we see materials enough for the worm that dieth not, or for the pleasures that are for evermore. (66–7)

In a characteristic appeal to those physiognomic principles shared by Hogg, the physical appearance – “[t]he stoop, the downcast regards, the dark and sinister expression of him who cannot lift up his head among his fellow men, or look his companions in the face” (67) – signifies moral character on earth and is a preview of the “dire and dreadful pandemonium” to come (68). “[I]n the full and final developments of character alone”, Chalmers sees “enough for imparting all its corrosion to the ‘worm that dieth not’ – enough for sustaining in all its fierceness ‘the fire that is not quenched’” (68). Chalmers’ utilisation of “the worm that dieth not” in this sermon represents an overarching motif in his works (see: Chalmers *Sermons and Discourses* 1: 127, 142–3, 179, 234, 363–4, 545, 601), and Hogg’s similar use serves as a potent critique of the malevolent consequences of Wringhim’s fanatical antinomian beliefs.

Wringhim’s failure to recognise this posited continuity between this life and the next and, importantly, the resultant connection between the corporeal body and the immortal spirit is a major factor in his progressive demise. When Gil-Martin first suggests the murder of Mr. Blanchard (a man who shares the title of “[t]he most popular of all their preachers of morality” (97–8) in Glasgow with Chalmers), Wringhim’s body reacts against the cold inhumanity of the murder:

I was so shocked, that my bosom became as it were a void, and the beatings of my heart sounded loud and hollow in it; my breath cut, and my tongue and palate became dry and speechless. (92)

As Chalmers explains, “our Maker” has so “framed our mental constitution, that in the very working of these bad affections there should be the painfulness of a felt discomfort and discordancy” (*On the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God*, 1: 102), and this immediate response was distinguished from the latter reflexive pains of a remorseful conscience – the “worm that dieth not”. However, like Combean phrenology and Brunonian concepts of addiction, Chalmers also recognised the power of habit in reinforcing vice or virtue (*On the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God*, 1: 133–57). In accordance with these contemporary theories, through the dually consolidating acts of dreaming and discoursing, Wringhim is soon able to rationalise the murder of Blanchard, as Gil-Martin’s powers over his mind and body grow. Still, however, when the time comes to act, his “hand refused the office” (96). Eventually the body, devoid of the conscious mind, acts to perpetrate matricide and femicide, and Wringhim is forced to suffer retribution for crimes of which he has no knowledge. The amalgamation of the devil within the flesh by this point in the narration coalesces with the cessation of the “natural, and amiable” bodily feelings (100). Hauntingly, Gil-Martin declares, “Our beings are amalgamated, as it were, and consociated in one, and never shall I depart from this country until I can carry you in triumph with me” (130),

As Gil-Martin physically wanes away in tandem with Wringhim, he persistently disregards the moral significance of the flesh, encouraging him to throw “off this frame of dross and corruption, mingle with the pure ethereal existence of existence, from which we derived our being” (161). This disregard for the flesh contrasts starkly with Chalmers’ conceptualisation of the afterlife. In his sermon, “The

Transitory Nature of Visible Things," published one year prior to the *Confessions*, he declares: "There is reason for believing, that some of the matter of our present bodies may exist in those more glorified and transformed bodies which we are afterwards to occupy" (*Sermons Preached in St. John's Church* 140). This is in apparent contrast to the "common imagination" of paradise as "a lofty aerial region, where the inmates float in ether, or are mysteriously suspended upon nothing" (*Sermons Preached in St. John's Church* 196).

Chalmers' evocation of a literal conceptualisation of the final resurrection places him within a line of writers working to mediate materialist science and a truly supernatural Christianity. Andrew Baxter forwarded an embodied conception of the afterlife, viewing the final resurrection as transformative and positing that "a small quantity of that bulk of matter that now composes them, will serve for corporeal systems in those *finer regions*" (Baxter 292–3, qtd. in Jackson, "James Hogg's *The Pilgrims of the Sun* and the Great Chain of Being" 74). Joseph Priestley and Thomas Forester appealed to an embodied conception of the afterlife in their defenses of materialism (Priestley xxiii–xxiv; Forester 101) and in his earlier poem, *The Pilgrims of the Sun* (1815), Hogg's own visionary dreamer and cosmological traveller, Mary Lee, learns that those who reside on a sphere closer to the sun and therefore to divine existence, in "the land of lovers, known afar, / And named the Evening and the Morning star" (3.147–48), are beautiful due to the embodied nature of the Christian salvation.⁵ More recently, in an essay on the compatibility of modern neuroscience and Christianity, Ted Peters argues that a belief in the separate existence of an immaterial soul is unnecessary and is, in fact, a false conflation of Christian theology and Cartesian dualism, and he rhetorically emphasises that through the ages "Christian teaching regarding the resurrection has consistently insisted on embodied salvation" (313).

In the *Confessions* Wringhim longs for what will be revealed to be an ultimately unachievable purely ethereal existence:

When my flesh and my bones are decayed, and my soul has passed to its everlasting home, then shall the sons of men ponder on the events of my life; wonder and tremble, and tremble and wonder how such things should be. (80)

Wringhim begins to recognise the coalescence of matter and spirit as he nears the end of his pilgrimage, but he is resistant to this realisation:

I was become a terror to myself; or rather, my body and soul were become terrors to each other; and, had it been possible, I felt as if they would have gone to war. I dared not look at my face in a glass, for I shuddered at my own image and likeness. (156–7)

The terror of glimpsing Gil-Martin's hideous visage (which presumably mirrors Wringhim's degraded state), however, leads to hellish epiphany:

Involuntarily did I turn round at the request, and caught a half glance of his features. May no eye destined to reflect the beauties of the New Jerusalem inward upon the beatific soul, behold such a sight as mine then beheld! My immortal spirit, blood, and bones, were all withered at the blasting sight;

and I arose and withdrew, with groanings which the pangs of death shall never wring from me. (162)

The fleshly eye and the heavenly eye are one and the same, and the body withers with the spirit. The physicality of Wringhim's sufferings comes to a fevered pitch in his second to last entry: "My vitals have all been torn, and every faculty and feelings of my soul racked, and tormented into callous insensibility" (165). Wringhim's suicide is the ultimate culmination of his inability to grasp the spiritual significance of corporeal life, and the uncanny preservation of his corpse underlines the embodied nature of his eternal damnation. Wringhim's longings for "*utter oblivion*" (126) and "peace or rest" (153) are never fulfilled, as the series of grave-disturbers continue the physical assault, fragmenting his body as Gil-Martin fragmented his consciousness. While the mismatched descriptions of Wringhim's corpse in "A Scots Mummy" and in the Editor's coda to the novel are certainly part of the greater overall incongruity of the text, the shifting appearance also mirrors the scene in the weaver's cottage, wherein Wringhim's clothing is mysteriously changed in his sleep. The implication may be that Gil-Martin's power over Wringhim's body continues beyond the grave – the flesh remains demonically shiftable.

The Nature of the Diabolic

The explanatory tensions of *Confessions* may be read as a purposeful effort by Hogg to maintain both demonic and psychological readings in an age in which physicians, such as Ferriar, systematically dismissed supernatural experience as "a symptom of bodily distemper, and of little more consequence than the head-ach and shivering attending a common catarrh" (Ferriar 138). However, rather than focusing upon tension, one may also view Hogg as organically fusing the diabolical with the most advanced Romantic science, and as such, echoing commentators such as Chalmers who sought to productively mediate materialist science and supernatural Christianity. The significance of the embodied damnation of Robert Wringhim is not a doctrinally specific critique. Rather, it is a critique of the way in which his fanatical antinomianism forces him to deny the "natural" human feelings and societal bonds, which at this time were being reified in medical and scientific discourses.

Chalmers propagated naturalistic scientific discourses as part of his larger project to form what Stewart Brown terms his "godly commonwealth" – a "new moral order" of society (Brown 138), which attempted to revive what he perceived as the benevolent communitarian values of the traditional rural Scottish parish system in the urban, industrial cities of nineteenth-century Scotland. Chalmers' experiment at St. John's parish in Glasgow, which he initiated in 1819, is the most famous application of his doctrines (Brown 129–51). The Disruption of 1843, with its breakdown of the collective influence of the Kirk over Scottish society, represented the "final failure of his godly commonwealth ideal" (Brown 373–4) and ended the possibility of realising his (to borrow Gillian Shepherd's literary analogy) inherently "Kailyard" vision (314).

Not unlike Chalmers, Hogg was concerned with preserving the traditional culture of rural Scotland against the relentless forces of modernisation in the nineteenth century. While his precise position in contemporary theological debates is notoriously difficult to ascertain (Garside xxvii), as a stalwart defender of the traditional and the folkloric, throughout his corpus we find an equation of true Christianity and a belief in the supernatural. In his poem, "Superstition" (*The Pilgrims of the Sun* 67–73) which accompanied *The Pilgrims of the Sun* in its initial publication in 1815, the "sceptic leveler" (10) with his "eye of reason" (179) extinguishes the

belief in Providence, and "soon that heavenly ray must ever cease to shine" (180), and in his sermon on "Deistical Reformers" within *A Series of Lay Sermons on Good Principles and Good Breeding* (1834), he declares that the "error of this age is to believe too little", decries their dismissal of Christianity on the grounds of its "incomprehensible" mysteries, and affirms that "wherever there is a display of the power or wisdom of God, either in revelation or the kingdom of nature, there also they will find a mystery beyond the capacity of human reason to unfold" (110). In the *Lay Sermons*, however, Hogg also discusses the "law of our constitution" (5), nature's "immutable laws" (69), and the value of "habit" over "precept" (73) for engraining the hatred of vice and love of virtue implanted in youth as "a guard which the providence of God has placed over us" (53). Perhaps Hogg's masterpiece may be read as a spectacularly chilling depiction of a "phenomena of nature" (Hogg, "A Scots Mummy" 139) – imaginatively fuelled by the power of contemporary science to reify traditional Christian morality, as well as to enable a vivid depiction of the horrifically tangible consequences of diabolical deviance.

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Notes

1. For a concise overview of the critical corpus, see Fielding 132–9. A key recent psychological reading not mentioned by Fielding is Faubert.
2. On Scott and the science of apparitions, see Smajic, and Ferris.
3. Ian Duncan reads this comment in "The Mysterious Bride" as a response to Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* ("The Upright Corpse").
4. Hogg cites Chalmers' "Astronomical Discourses" in a note added to his early experimental dream poem, *The Pilgrims of the Sun* (1815), in *The Poetical Works of James Hogg* (1822). Discussion of this citation is beyond the scope of the present article. On the success of the "Astronomical Discourses", see Brown 107–09.
5. See particularly, Part 3, lines 134–40 of Hogg's poem. While not citing this particular passage, in his article on "James Hogg's *The Pilgrims of the Sun* and the Great Chain of Being", Jackson briefly discusses the significance of "Baxter's explanation of the continued existence of both soul and body" (74) in relation to *The Pilgrims of the Sun*, the ballad of "Kilmeny" (included in *The Queen's Wake* (1813)), and the short story, "On the Separate Existence of the Soul" (1831).

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